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Abstract

Past studies of the pulsing dynamism of the Chartist movement and its poets active between 1838–1848 have either ignored print trade workers or categorised them as members of the 'labour aristocracy': privileged, skilled, conservative figures at one remove from class based struggles, intent on protecting trade guild privileges. Yet, creative compositor poets did utilise their talents to engage with issues of social reform, welfare, educational aspirations and civic nationalism subsequent to the ebbing of Chartist inspired creative writing. Poetry featured in Scottish print trade journals of the mid- to late-nineteenth century in ways that suggested a strong engagement with an enfranchised labouring class, focused on civic nationalism, citizenship, union politics and self-improvement. This piece examines such themes in the work of three Scottish compositor poets (Alexander Smart, James Smith and Robert Brough) who featured in the *Scottish Typographical Circular* from the late 1850s through to the late 1870s as *de facto* poets in residence. Though forgotten now, during their lifetimes they were lauded as 'labour laureates', speaking of and to the Scottish labouring classes in general, and to print trade colleagues in particular, and writing in the Scottish vernacular.

The *Scottish Typographical Circular* [*STC*], a Scottish union backed journal aimed at print trade workers in Scotland, launched on 5 September 1857 as a monthly, priced at one penny with strong commitments to print trade concerns. (It would survive as the key voice of Scottish print trade workers through to the late twentieth century.) The leading article of the first issue declared the journal would be devoted to 'the legitimate benefit of the working printer in Scotland, by the dissemination of printing intelligence,

and the consideration of the various measures likely to affect his position for better or worse.'[1] This was to be accomplished not only through news articles and trade reports, but also through creative self-expression reflecting the opinions of the print worker – original verse, prose memoirs and serial fiction.

The act of featuring creative work in such trade press outlets was political. As Kirstie Blair has noted, by championing the work of self-taught poets and writers, journals such as these enacted a commitment to reformist, even radical, politics.

> In the common perception of the mid-Victorian period, writing poetry was a sign of aspirational culture and self improvement. It showed that working men and women were educated, thoughtful and intelligent, plus it indicated that they possessed 'right feeling'. Therefore, it constituted direct evidence that nothing was to be feared from extending the franchise in their favour.[2]

Such work also encouraged communication and intellectual endeavours amongst members, as well as offering spaces for debate and discussion for those less inclined to oratorical flourishes in public meetings. 'As, however, there are many who, although not calculated to shine at a general meeting (through timidity or want of nerve)', pronounced the editors of the London based *Typographical Circular* (launched in 1854), 'yet possess the ability of putting their thoughts into intelligible sentences, the columns of the *Typographical Circular* will afford them the means of doing so, with satisfaction to themselves and benefit to the trade.'[3]

The written word was seen as a powerful tool for engagement with fellow members; unlike the words of public speakers, it was not evanescent and quickly forgotten, but thought through, permanently available for considered review, and more likely, therefore, to influence civic society. Contributions from readers were to be welcomed, 'because it is the epitome of such men – thoughtful, studious, and well-informed – which generally sway the decisions of the Trade Delegates in chapel, and are of more importance than the windy speeches of empty orators.'[4]

Citizenship and social identity were key components of material produced for the *STC* and its trade counterparts, and paramount in the poetry featured in the *STC* was an acknowledgement and celebration of the role of

the print fraternity in circulating knowledge through their labours. Trade identity was in such cases a political statement, a reiteration of the value of such skilled artisans to civic society.

PRINTER LAUREATES

A feature of the *STC* was its use of in-house compositor poets. Little has been said in the past of the creative compositors whose work proved such a mainstay of early print trade journals like the *STC*. Poetry was ubiquitous in the popular and periodical press of the nineteenth century, overflowing in fact through channels overlooked by past literary critics and historians. Only recently has this deficiency been addressed by scholars such as Kirstie Blair, Andrew Hobbs, Natalie Houston, Linda K. Hughes, and Kathryn Ledbetter.[5] It is worth reflecting on a recent data analysis of nineteenth-century local newspapers by Andrew Hobbs, who has estimated that there were between four to six million poems published in the nineteenth-century English provincial press alone.[6] Print trade focused poetry fed into such textual bounty. Between 1857 and 1876, the *STC* featured over two hundred poems in its pages. It also published a significant number of short stories and memoirs by creative compositors. A survey of the extant material, the background of creative compositors and printers, and the themes and topics they addressed, offers valuable insights into the way creativity was often harnessed to address trade specific social, cultural, and work-based themes and concerns.

Scottish printer laureates featured in practically every issue of the *STC* into the 1870s, either through their poetry, through reviews of their work, or in reports of their creative activities. Many have been unjustly neglected, with work that still stands out today for its vibrancy and creative flair. Scottish examples included Alexander Smart, James Smith and Robert Brough, successive contributors to the *STC* from its inception in 1857 into the 1870s.

One of the most tragic of such early compositor poets was Alexander Smart (1798–1866). Born in Montrose, Smart was based for much of his working life in Edinburgh. Smart, like his better known and highly lauded contemporary Hugh Miller, stonemason turned geologist and poet, wrote hymns and elegies to the working lives of the labouring classes, paralleling

themes explored by the ultimate, iconic Scots 'lad o' pairts', the eighteenth-century poet Robert Burns. The printer-poet Smart found early success with verses featured in journals such as *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*, edited in Montrose by his friend James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. Smart's poem, 'The Flight of Time', featured in the first volume of *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* in 1845, was frequently reprinted in the 1850s and 1860s in American and Australian newspaper outlets.[7] Alexander would not be the only one in his family to involve himself in supporting labouring class intellectual and creative aspirations: his brother James Smart (1800–1862), a compositor employed at the *Caledonian Mercury* for over forty years, was instrumental in founding the Edinburgh Mechanics' Subscription Library in 1826, twice acting as its secretary and avidly committed to its aims of providing 'plentiful and cheap reading for the working classes of Edinburgh.'[8]

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Alexander Smart acquired a name for himself as a versifier of some talent, featured at public events and written about in newspapers and literary journals. When the eminent antiquarian Reverend Charles Rogers delivered a well-attended public lecture in Stirling on Scottish lyrical poets, he included Smart in a list of thirty important contemporary practitioners. The point was widely reported in papers throughout the region.[9] Similarly, when a grand day of celebrations was held in 1844 at the Alloway Kirk in Ayr on the Centenary of Robert Burns's birth, irate commentaries published in the *Dundee Courier* and *Scotch Reformers Gazette* lamented that the organising committee had failed to give space at the celebration to poets like William Thom, William Miller and Alexander Smart.[10] These individuals were held up as exemplifying the continuing tradition of Scottish verse, 'kindred spirits of the great poet – the living personification, if we may so speak, of Burns himself.'[11] The editorials concluded scathingly, 'Would it have been any great stretch on the part of Messieurs Bone and Gray, the secretaries of this festival, to have invited these choice spirits to it – these native bards, emulous, perhaps, of the fame of Burns, yet some of them struggling, perhaps, as he did, with adversity, but whose works are full of riches and sparkling gems.'[12] Smart did in the end attend the event, dedicating and delivering a 48 line poem to Burns's three sons Robert Burns, Colonel William Nicol Burns and Major James Glencairn Burns, who had been in attendance throughout the day's ceremonies.[13]

Though conscious that his public profile had been built on producing

poetry in the vein of Burns, Smart focused much of his work in the late 1850s on labour, the print trade and domestic themes. Smart's poetry was a key element of the creative material featured in the *Scottish Typographical Circular* from its inception in 1857 through to late 1860. His trade press poetry offered commentary on labour themes, extolled the press and its honest print workers, and included reflective pieces centred on Scottish domestic scenes, often written in the Scots vernacular. His final collection of poems, *Songs of Labour and Domestic Life*, featured first in serial form in the *STC* between 1859 and 1860, was issued in book form in 1860.[14] Reviews ranged from mildly excited to unremarkable in tone. Those on the positive side noted its range of subjects and pleasing poetic form. 'His poetry is genuine – vigorous, smooth and natural, while his subjects generally are well chosen, and treated in an intelligent and pleasing manner', remarked a critic for *The Stirling Observer*.[15] A review in the *Elgin and Morayshire Courier* hailed Smart as a poet who wrote in a fine, healthy, moral tone with elevated social feeling. 'With the patriotism of a genuine Scotchman', the reviewer exclaimed, 'he combines a love of the beautiful and true; and his muse is never more at home than in the liveliest scenes of domestic life.'[16]

Such praise seems not to have eased Smart's tortured lack of self-confidence, for it was said that the volume's indifferent critical reception caused the irreversible breakdown in his health, leading to his confinement shortly after in Craighouse, a mental health sanatorium in the hills of Morningside, Edinburgh. He never re-emerged. When news of Alexander Smith's commitment to an asylum in 1861 became public knowledge, a public subscription was launched to raise funds for his family. Over £40 was gathered, with contributions from print chapels in major publishing and printing houses such as William Blackwood & Sons, Oliver & Boyd, Blackie & Sons, and the *Scottish Press* and *Courant* newspaper offices.[17] He died five years later, on 18 October 1866, having never left the sanatorium grounds. Obituary notices were small but widespread, from Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh to Leeds, London, Wales and the USA.[18] All stressed his dual vocation as compositor and poet, active in both from the 1830s onwards and highly celebrated by his fellow workers. 'The journeymen printers were all proud of him', a contemporary source acknowledged, 'and he, for his part, was always proud of the class to which he belonged, as his 'Songs of Labour' and other poems abundantly testify.'[19] Despite early praise and commendation as a Scots lyrical poet, as labour

poet he remained unsung and critically neglected in more general social terms, a fact pointedly remarked on in contemporary notices. 'It was not Mr Smart's fortune to secure any public recognition of his poetic efforts', commented the *Edinburgh Courant*.[20] It was a point subsequently picked up and reprinted in the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Daily News* and the *Brecon County Times*.

James Smith (1824–1887), the next poet-laureate to occupy the pages of the *STC*, had more critical success, rising to prominence in the 1850s and 1860s as a working-class poet, children's versifier and comic storyteller, and writing, like Smart, in the Scots vernacular. He was born in March 1824 in a crumbling Edinburgh tenement in St Mary's Wynd (now St Mary's Street), the son of a coach lace weaver. He began a printing apprenticeship aged eleven, and on completing it worked for thirty years in the print trade, 'tramping' in England and Ireland, then taking up positions as journeyman printer, reader and manager with the law printers Aikman, who produced the daily reports from the Scottish Court of Sessions. Smith also held positions as a reader for the *Scotsman* and the *Daily Review* newspapers. In 1869, when the board of the Edinburgh Mechanics' Subscription Library, based in Riddle's Court, off Edinburgh's High Street, met to choose a new librarian from six shortlisted applicants, 61 to 39 voted in favour of Smith. It was a position he held until his death of an acute attack of asthma and related disorders in December 1887.[21]

Smith distinguished himself as a comic storyteller, songwriter and poet. During his lifetime, his poetry and comic work featured not just in the *Scottish Typographical Circular* but also in local newspapers and journals and subsequently in book form.[22] Smith was held locally in great esteem and viewed with great fondness, a fact attested to in 1875, when Edinburgh citizens presented him with a silver salver and a purse of two hundred guineas, raised by public subscription 'as a mark of their admiration of his genius and character.'[23] After his death in 1887, public donations were again forthcoming to fund the installation in 1889 of a carved plinth over his grave in Edinburgh's Grange Cemetery.[24]

On assumption of his librarian duties in 1869, James Smith began to pull back from his work for the *Scottish Typographical Circular*. His contributions as the *STC's* self-appointed poet laureate had started tapering off throughout 1868 as a new, *de-facto* trade bard appeared alongside him in the journal's pages – Robert Brough (1830–1903). Brough's first contribution to

the *STC* dated back to 1861. Born in Wigtown, Brough had served as a compositor apprentice in Stranraer, possibly with Hugh Wylie, the main bookseller and printer based in Church Street, while living in the adjacent parish town of Leswalt.[25] He moved to Edinburgh with his family in 1860, and worked as a compositor first for Murray and Gibb and then for Ballantyne and Co.[26] In August 1876 he took up a position at Blackie & Co. (Glasgow), then in 1878 joined the printers Anderson and Mackay. He would remain in Glasgow until his death in 1903.[27]

Brough specialised in trade-focused poetry, as well as material written in Scots. Early contributions to the *STC* were written in broad Scots, imitating the style and intonation of Robert Burns. His first submission, 'Coming Events Cast their *Shadows* Before', appeared in January 1861. A poem written in broad Scots with Burnsian phrasing, it took note of the contemporary movement of women into the printing world led and inspired by Emily Faithfull (such as the founding of the female only, London based Victoria Press and its Edinburgh counterpart the Caledonian Press).[28] The entry of women is portrayed tongue in cheek as an improvement in the print space: foul language would be moderated, brandy and snuff would be cast aside, and works would flow from the nimble fingers of independent women. As a result, Brough declaims:

> On every book we cast our e'en
> Some great improvement will be seen:
> A' coarse, vile words, and angry spleen,
> Changed to sublime:
> Woman will purge our language clean
> In little time.
>
> Then let ilk lassie raise a cheer,
> They'll a' be right before next year;
> A *Faithfull* friend, it would appear,
> Leads in the van.
> Wha sounds their praises far and near
> Throughout the lan'.

More to the point, men will quake and tremble before the newly empowered working woman:

Already I can hear them speak,
When they ha'e made a stunning week;
It winna be the peevish squeak
We used to hear;
They'll mak the bluid dance to your cheek—
You'll quake wi' fear.

And this, nae doubt, is only right,
For lang enough they've got the slight;
But, noo when they stop wark at night,
Aye fresh and nimble;
Their stride o' independent might
Will mak us tremble.[29]

From there, it is a short step from independence to emigration, and Brough ends the poem invoking the results and calling on young compositors to marry to stop such a calamitous exit to new lands:

But, oh, if they should emigrate!
We'll soon sink to a waefu' state;
Then ye young chaps, ere its' ower late,
Rin, tak a wife!
Implore the dears at hame to wait,
Save Briton's life![30]

It is difficult to tell whether Brough is openly sympathising with the women's compositor movement or mocking their aspirations, but the poetic style is a standard rhyming couplet scheme seen also in the work of his *STC* printer poet counterparts.

Brough's poetry featured sporadically in the *STC* between 1862 and 1867. He began contributing on a regular basis between 1868 and 1874, taking over as the *STC's* key poetic commemorator on trade culture and events. He would write in standard English and also in broad Scots. A good example of the former can be found in a poem published in the May 1870 issue which plays upon implied criticisms that the *STC* did not provide enough general news.[31] His answer was to summarise the month's

key events in verse. Brough's opening stanza lays out the arguments and urges all to pay heed to his news summary:

> Some won't buy the *Circular*—making excuse,
> That it seldom contains any General News;
> But that's quite absurd, for, in this very sheet,
> They'll find everything of importance complete;
> And, after this date, if men use such a plea,
> With their hair, ears, or nose, I'll be sure to make free.
> Look alive! Then, and get this rich stock in your garrets,
> Then on all public points you can gabble like parrots.[32]

Brough then cleverly works his way through political events, entertainingly fitting these in twenty-six rhyming couplets alongside crime, culture and commerce items. Brough crams in references to Disraeli, Livingstone, royalty, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, scientists, explorers, local events and well-known advertisers.

He comically chastises the skinflints who fail to buy their own copy of the *Circular*, for with just a penny they would thus receive all the news needed, mixed up like sausages bought from the local butchers:

> So there, that's the whole, even down to the locals,
> Well mixed, like those sausages purchased at Jockel's;
> Then, no more get-outs, for they're used by too many—
> For no other purpose than saving a Penny![33]

Brough would also play a part in the Edinburgh printer's strike of 1872–73, producing poetry for *Out on Strike*, the eight-page, octavo-sized weekly journal issued by workers during the union action. The 14 December 1872 issue featured one such contribution: a stirring call to arms in the wages struggle, 'Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel' which called on readers to fight for equality and justice. It began:

> Up, up! Arouse each honest man!
> There's danger I delay:
> Strive to be foremost in the van,
> And soon we'll gain the day.

'Tis not for class or rank we fight,
But for the world's weal:
Stand forth, then! Show that right is might:
Put your shoulder to the wheel.

The poem continued with reminders to all that the fight was a just one, led by free men acting against tyranny, and resonated with a strident union rhetoric that had been absent from previous contributions from Brough. The concluding stanzas offered a vision of what could be the results of working towards a common purpose, namely victory, power and a liberty that would come from putting that shoulder to the wheel:

Pull strength, and pull together all!
Not distant is the hour
When those who now are thought so small
Will claim their share of power!
When wealth does humble worth despite,
And spurn each just appeal,
There's something in each breast that cries—
Put your shoulder to the wheel!

Of half its jarring thoughts and griefs
This world might soon be free,
If man to help his brother man
In earnest would agree!
Oh! could the great for one short hour,
Feel what the lowly feel,
Their pamper'd spirits soon would sour:
Put your shoulder to the wheel!

See Victory from her lofty tower,
In pride the battle scan:
'Fear not,' she shouts: 'the darkest hour
Still comes before the dawn!'
March on in triumph, loudly cheer,
Till foes do backward reel,
Then liberty bright smiles shall wear:
Put your shoulder to the wheel![34]

Brough's contributions to the *Scottish Typographical Circular* ceased on his move to Glasgow in 1876. There is no record of him undertaking further literary work, and by the turn of the twentieth century he had faded into obscurity and poverty, dying in the Gorbals area of Glasgow in 1903.

CIVIC CELEBRATIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Topics reflected upon by these printer poets included reading, literacy, the art of printing and union solidarity. One feature stands out of such contributions to the *STC*, namely their oral and bardic origins. Many of the poems reproduced in the *STC* were originally performed in public for key events in the print trade, such as annual soirees, wayzgooses and trade dinners, launches and unveilings of trade spaces and buildings, fundraisers for individuals or print related causes, and social gatherings to mark departures and retirements.[35] In these circumstances, as the printed evidence makes clear, spoken and sung poetry and verse were vital parts of such public events, counterpointing key themes underpinning the commemorations. The *STC* reprinted such efforts wholesale, maintaining the original cadence and rhythm of the spoken texts as presented on the day.

Compositor poets were treated as respected bards anchored in oral, local and trade culture, and civic duties were expected of them. Alexander Smart's civic 'turns' were frequently noted in the *Scottish Typographical Circular*, and his poetry was featured in the left-hand column of the front page of every issue from January 1858 through to late 1860. This Scottish 'labour laureate' was in frequent demand to round off artisanal literary soirees, openings and social events with a poetic recitation or a specially commissioned piece set to music and sung by an invited entertainer. A good example was his appearance in November 1859 as the keynote speaker at the Edinburgh Letterpress Printers' soiree, where he recited his Scots dialect poem 'Madie's Schule', reprinted as the lead piece of the 3 December 1859 issue of the *STC*. Here, recalled for all was stern schoolteacher Madie, who ran a garret school[36] with discipline dispensed by way of the taws (a leather strap) or rewards of a penny and sweets for the top scholars.

> To the whir o' the wheel, while auld baudrons would sing,
> On stools, wee an' muckle, a' ranged in a ring

Ilk idle bit urchin, wha glowered aff his book,
Was caught in a twinkling by Madie's dread look.

She ne'er spak' a word, but the taws she would fling!
The sad leather whang up the culprit maun bring,
While his sair bluthered face, as the palmies would fa',
Proclaimed through the schule an example for a'.

But though Madie could punish, she weel could reward,
The gude and the eydant aye won her regard—
A Saturday penny she freely would gi'e,
And the second best scholar got aye a bawbee.[37]

Smart was also called on to offer poetic addresses to open ceremonial proceedings, such as at the opening of the Edinburgh Printers' Library on 20 November 1858, the results of which were duly printed on the front page of the December 1858 issue of the *STC*. He, like other poet laureates that followed, saw it as one of their civic responsibilities to compose and perform pieces where and when needed in support of trade related events.

DIALECT FORMS

A key feature of several poems and creative pieces published in the *STC* was their use of Scots dialect forms. This was not unusual for the time: Scots dialect material permeated much of locally produced contemporary Scottish press material, as William Donaldson noted in 1986.[38] Aimed at an audience with an ear for local spoken language, it bespoke a linguistic identity nestled within a broader trade and North British identity, evident in the English language pieces that enfolded Alexander Smart's Scots dialect poetry in the *STC*. Smart's work was highly valued by the *STC*'s editors and print trade audience: he was seen as one of their own, exploring and invoking trade values in informal vernacular tone while also offering sentimental rhymes on domestic and social topics. Themes of educational joy like those evident in 'Madie's Schule' were leavened by more reasoned expatiations on the benefit of self-help, clean living and dignity in labour. They were part and parcel of Smart's output and reputation. 'He is a son of

toil and sings to the sons of toil' noted one trade review of his collected *Songs of Labour*:

> He sings of the blessing of labour, and inculcates the duties of self-culture, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-control [. . .] and he is ever ready, as "Labour's Laureate", to defend its honest claims, and to rebuke those capitalists who [. . .] would buy and sell his muscle and his brain in the same fashion as they would the most worthless article of merchandise.[39]

Others remarked that Smart's labour poetry 'vindicated his claims as the voice of the industrious poor.'[40]

Similar dialect forms featured in the work of James Smith, Smart's successor as *STC* poet in residence. Writing in Doric Scots as well as Metropolitan Scots, a dialect of the Old Town of Edinburgh, Smith was commended by contemporaries for verses that 'always glow with life', or – in the case of his best-known children's poetry – displayed 'considerable powers of humorous expression'.[41] One such jaunty nursery piece, 'Baloo, My Bairnie, Fa' Asleep', featured in the *STC* in July 1864, sitting alongside correspondence on the dire health of printers and notices of union meetings. The first stanza gives an indication of the way in which Smith used Scots terminology to strong effect:

> My sonsy wean! My darlin' bairn!
> My bonnie sweet wee lammie!
> Cosy I' yer beddy-baw,
> Crawin' to yer mammy!
> Blessin's on yer cheekies red,
> An' wee bit lauchin' e'e.
> Sparklin' like the gowden lift,
> Wi' gladsome, sunny glee!
> Baloo, my bairnie, fa' asleep,
> O hushy, hushy baw![42]

Subsequent generations of Scottish children grew up with one variation or other of his children's ditty 'Clap, Clap, Handies', which partially ran:

Clap, clap handies
Deddy's coming ben
Wi' siller bells an' coral shells
Three score an' ten;

A' to gie his laddie—
His bonnie wee bit laddie—
Clap, clap, handies,
Deddy's comin' ben![43]

These, and children's verses such as Smith's equally well-known composition, 'Wee Joukydaidles', described by a contemporary as 'perfection of its kind', 'a graphic and life-like photograph of a steerin', dish-breakin', sugar-licking Scotch wean', were frequently reprinted in decades following. 'Wee Joukydaidles' in particular enjoyed a long afterlife, moving across newspaper and book formats and into popular culture. Originally featured in the 20 August 1864 issue of the *Scotsman*, it was quickly picked up by regional sources, and reprinted a few days later in both the *Dundee Courier and Argus* and the *Birmingham Daily Post*.[44] Subsequently reprinted in Smith's 1865 poetry collection *Poems, Songs and Ballads*, it became a perennial favourite internationally as poem, recited verse and popular song.[45] Over the next half century and through into the 1920s, the poem would feature in Scots ballad and children's verse collections, and reprints and notices of its public performance would appear in UK, American, Australian and New Zealand press outlets.[46]

Smith's poetic and prose contributions to the *STC* ranged from the reflective to the serio-comic in tone and language. Dialect forms were part of the mix, and over the years of association with the *STC* Smith produced several pieces that drew on Broad Scots intonations and spelling. A typical example was his contribution to the front page of the 2 January 1864 issue, the eight-stanza poem 'The Three Wee Flowers'. The poem, ostensibly a rumination by a female narrator on three flowers blooming in her garden, turns quickly into a *memento mori*, revealing the sombre truth that the garden spoken of is a graveyard, and the three wee flowers are her children buried there. The phrasing, much like other Scots dialect examples featured in the *STC*, is complex and dependent on particular forms of Scots spelling

and pronunciation to ensure the rhyme scheme flows. It moves swiftly from wistful to tragic in the first two stanzas:

> Three flow'rets bloom'd I' my garden ha'.
> I' the blithe sweet days o' langsyne;
> An' bonny an' fair were the three wee flowers
> That ance were Willie and mine.
>
> But a blicht cam owre my puir wee flowers,
> I' the time o' the frost an' the snaw;
> For they nestl'd their heids i' my sorrowin' breast,
> An' they droopit an' dow'd awa.

The final stanza reveals where the narrator is declaiming this lament, namely the graveyard:

> An' leeze me lang on the core o' my heart,
> Whase fondness may I never tine;
> But it's low low doun I' yon eerie yird
> Lie the three wee flowers o' mine.[47]

Robert Brough also wrote in broad Scots, addressing questions such as identity and trade solidarity. A good example was his 'Address to the Printers of Auld Reekie Now in London', printed in the *Scottish Typographical Circular* in October 1870. The poem was a lament and a call to London based Scottish compositors to return to Edinburgh. The poet descries the loss of trade members to London, and asks what is wrong with the old city that prevents them returning. The language is complex and rooted in Scots terms and phonetic spelling, as the opening sequence demonstrates:

> Ye chaps wha toil at case and press in Lunnan's muckle toun,
> What's wrang wi' dear Auld Reekie now, that fient a ane comes doun?
> Your hearts are surely blunted sair, or something waur ta'en place,
> Since in the crowds by boat and rail we ne'er see ae kenn'd face.[48]

The poem goes on to list Edinburgh's many pleasures, its native air, comfor-

table streets, hills and suburban pleasures, which are tongue-in-cheek compared to similar though less favourable London delights. It asks Scottish readers to recall the delights of walking in the Pentland Hills, or strolling around Edinburgh's central landmark, the hilly outcrop of 'Arthur's Seat', 'Where Art and Nature ha'e combined to mak' the scene complete'. Do not forget your comrades, the poem concludes, return to Edinburgh before the summer passes, and you will find a warm welcome, a bed, food, and a friendly hand:

> Noo, then, I'm done! But to my words ye really maun tak' heed,
> And ne'er again let simmer pass unless ye cross the Tweed:
> For weel ye ken our clannish ways,—that, 'midst a' jeers and slurs,
> Auld honest cronies we respect, and stick to them like burs.
> What though your togs were no a' new, and wadna cut a dash?
> Or maybe—constant plague wi' me—ye werena rife o' cash;
> We'll a' be proud to see ye here;—and, hang me, but I'll vaunt—
> A dram, your supper, or a bed, I'll swear ye wadna want![49]

Thus trade particular terminology, local dialect poetry and Scots based prose forms were combined in such spaces to offer verse material that was specifically nuanced to appeal to readers of such Scottish based trade journals, as well as shape cultural identity within such spaces.

TRADE PRINT CLASS AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS

That the printing fraternity in general, and the British print trade in particular, produced creative talents of various note and developed outlets in which to feature such talent is hardly surprising. Nineteenth century working-class writing emanating from the printing trade was linked in key ways to a privileged sense of place in the social hierarchy of labour organisation. Printers and compositors were at the forefront of nineteenth-century social and trade union movements, in terms of union organisation, social support, establishing libraries and educational centres, and in organising and actively engaging in literary and cultural events.[50] Scottish printing unions hosted Burns nights events, celebrated four hundred years of printing in 1850, ran literary soirees and fund raisers for bereaved printing families and

widows, set up bereavement and funeral funds, retirement and emigration schemes, and sponsored sick benefit and tramping or unemployment schemes.[51] Newspapers, trade journals and private members' publications were also subsidised.[52] These allowed individuals the opportunity to reaffirm their interests and connections with cultural activity, through recitations of poetry and music, presentation of short plays and the promotion of public readings.

However, not all thought such literary miscellany material appropriate for a trade journal: as one reviewer sniffily commented in a piece in 1858 comparing the *Scottish Typographical Circular* with the newly launched *Australian Typographical Circular*, 'The [Scottish] Circular has had more of the literary mixed up with it than some might think desirable in a trade journal.'[53] Implicit in comments like this were class-based tensions between expectations and aspirations. Printers and compositors were viewed as important accessories to literary and print communication, turning manuscripts and written text into printed form. But such practical knowledge seemed to militate in cultural terms against being taken seriously as creative producers. Such tensions manifested not just in views offered in review and correspondence columns, but also in reviews of printer poets.

A good example of this was brought out in a January 1865 *Scotsman* review of a volume of James Smith's poetry, a work that had been typeset and privately printed by Smith. Though generally admiring of his talent, and noting with some pleasure that several of the entries had originally appeared in the pages of the *Scotsman*, the reviewer suggested such creativity was not a common feature of the working man in general, and the compositor in particular. Quoting approvingly from remarks made by the contemporary historian John Hill Burton in his bibliographical study *The Book Hunter* on the perceived 'indifference of printers to literature save as it affects them in the shape of "copy" ', the reviewer concurred with such estimations of the intellectual capacity of mere handlers of type, and noted:

> We have heard of printers being interested in a novel they were setting; we have now and then – to our wonderment from the rarity of such demonstration – heard a laugh from a reading-boy over one of *Punch's* jokelets; but as a rule Mr Burton is right; and the fact that few printers have become, in any but the literal sense, men of letters, bears out his implication of their general mediocrity of

> intellect; if, indeed, the blunders with which they vex authors' souls do not stamp them, in the mass, with deliberate dullness.[54]

It would have been interesting to know what the compositors of the *Scotsman* had made of this slur on their character as they went about typesetting the offending comments.

Two weeks later the displeased editor of the *Scottish Typographical Circular* made clear his own views, using the first three pages of the February issue to roundly castigate the reviewer for such fatuous remarks. 'Let us turn for a moment to the very important and remarkable discoveries he has made as to the intellectual darkness in which the members of the printing trade are at present enveloped', the *STC* editorial caustically noted, going on to quote the offending paragraph denigrating printing intellect, and then incredulously querying, 'Now, how are we, in the brief space of a single article, to meet these astounding assertions?'[55] The answer was to draw attention to prime exemplars of printers turned authors, journalists and editors, including the *Scotsman's* current editor, and to conclude scathingly that conceit and ignorant presumption might be attributes more potentially applicable to the reviewer himself.

The snide review to which James Smith's allies responded vigorously exemplified a class-based view of the artisanal nature of printing and typesetting, pronouncing skeptically on the ability of mechanics of print to engage meaningfully in creative endeavours. Twentieth-century Marxist historians and literary critics focused on the studying Chartist movement poetry in many instances ignored creative compositors active during that period, presenting them as members of the 'labour aristocracy', inauthentic and privileged skilled workers demarcated by their educational backgrounds and grounding in language usage.[56]

Such categorisations also saw printers painted as conservative figures standing to the side of class based struggles, intent on protecting what in essence were trade guild privileges.[57] Rather, many creative compositors utilised their skills to shift across class lines, becoming journalists, essayists, editors, press 'conductors', and proprietors, intent on advancing and improving educational and social conditions for all. The *Scottish Typographical Circular* was launched sometime after the high tide of Chartism had dissipated. While not participants in the Chartist movement *per se*, the printers and compositors who contributed to it were sympathetic to the

general tenets of the movement which had sought universal male suffrage for the working classes and stronger parliamentary representation.[58]

Later in the century many compositors would play key parts in national union frameworks such as trade councils and the Trade Union Congress, seeking further political freedoms for the working classes.[59] Of more immediate concern to the working-class printers who followed in the wake of the Chartist movement, though, were social reforms that enabled working class advancement and encouraged personal independence, decent wages and improved living standards. Those who made the most of their situations to shift across social borders were encouraged and applauded by fellow print workers.

CONCLUSION

Sydney Shep has argued that the typographical presses functioned as guardians of historical memory, playing 'a critical role in manufacturing, disseminating, and sustaining the trade identity and socio-cultural memory practices of printers.'[60] Commemorations, celebrations, and notes of trade traditions featured as part of the makeup of such journals. Such material could be seen as functioning to remind printers of their shared trade heritage and history, as well as using shared traditions within which to enfold and contextualise new ideas and trade innovations. But the creative material featured in the early years of the typographical trade press complicates and nuances this argument. Creative poetry, as we have seen in the striking examples discussed in this piece, sat alongside creative non-fiction, news, and trade event reports, counterpointing, commenting, commemorating and critiquing. Such material was used not just to reflect on and shape trade identity, but also to engage with the contemporary realities of the print workspace, and the political, social and cultural concerns of print trade workers. Creative work published in journals such as the *Scottish Typographical Circular* addressed readers through shared trade language, offered poems, verses, and stories grounded in oral and bardic traditions, featured locally recognised trade 'labour laureates', and drew on regional dialects to connect directly to intended audiences. Typographical journals like the *STC* offered valuable spaces for creative experimentation. Compositor poets and writers had their place in such textual spaces, and as can

be seen, were honoured, supported and given freedom to publish work of social interest which better enables us to interpret and engage contextually with nineteenth-century print trade culture.

Notes

This is a revised version of material featured in Chapter 3 of the recently published monograph, David Finkelstein, *Movable Types: Roving Creative Printers of the Victorian World* (Oxford, 2018).

1 *Scottish Typographical Circular*, September 1857, p. 1.
2 Kirstie Blair (ed.), *The Poets of the Peoples Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2016), p. xvi.
3 *Typographical Circular* 1, New Series (1854).
4 Ibid.
5 Kirstie Blair, '"A Very Poetical Town": Newspaper poetry and the working class poet in Victorian Dundee', *Victorian Poetry* 52 (2014), pp. 89–109; Kirstie Blair, '"Let the Nightingales Alone": Correspondence columns, the Scottish press, and the making of the working-class poet', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47 (2014), pp. 188–207; Natalie Houston, 'Newspaper Poems', *Victorian Studies* 50 (2008), pp. 233–42; Andrew Hobbs, 'Five Million Poems, or the Local Press as Poetry Publisher, 1800–1900', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45 (2012), pp. 488–92; Linda K. Hughes, 'What the Wellesley Index Left Out: Why poetry matters to periodical studies', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 40 (2007), pp. 91–125; Kathryn Ledbetter, *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).
6 Hobbs, p. 488.
7 See, for example, Alexander Smart, 'The Flight of Time', *The Farmer and Mechanic*, 26 December 1850, p. 619; *American Union*, 1 February 1851, p. 4; *Boston Weekly Museum*, 29 March 1851, p. 335; *Christian Enquirer*, 4 January 1851, p. 4; *American Union*, 1 May 1852, p. 4; *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, 4 January 1851, p. 1; *Britannia and Trades' Advocate*, 3 February 1851, p. 4; *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 2 March 1867, p. 4.
8 'Obituary', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 2 August 1862, p. 200. James Smith, referred to later in this piece, would become its librarian in 1869.
9 *Stirling Observer*, 6 March 1856, p. 3; *Fife Herald, Kinross, Strathearn and Clackmannan Advertiser*, 6 March 1856, p. 2.
10 William Thom (1788–1848) was a working-class poet whose works were steeped in the Scots language. Born in Aberdeen and best known for his poetry collection *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1844), he died of consumption in Dundee in 1848, and was buried in the Western Cemetery under a memorial erected by his local admirers. William Miller (1810–1872), a Glasgow based children's poet also steeped in Scots language verse work, was best known for his nursery rhyme 'Wee Willie Winkie', published in the 1842 collection *Whistle Binkie: Stories from the Fireside* (Glasgow: David Robertson, 1842).

11 *Dundee Courier*, 6 August 1844, p. 3.
12 Ibid.
13 *Caledonian Mercury*, 8 August 1844, p. 3.
14 Alexander Smart, *Songs of Labour and Domestic Life; with Rhymes for Littler Readers* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1860).
15 *Stirling Observer*, 14 October 1860, p. 2.
16 *Elgin and Morayshire Courier*, 21 September 1860, p. 3.
17 *Scottish Typographical Circular* (1861), pp. 328, 337.
18 *Daily News*, 24 October 1866, p. 2; *Dundee Courier*, 22 October 1866, p. 2; *Leeds Mercury*, 24 October 1866, p. 3; *Glasgow Herald*, 23 October 1866, p. 3; *Brecon County Times*, 3 November 1866, p. 3; *National Republican*, 16 November 1866, p. 2.
19 *Dundee Courier*, 22 October 1866, p. 2.
20 Quoted in *Brecon County Times*, 3 November 1866, p. 3.
21 *Scotsman*, 18 November 1869, p. 2. The library was founded in 1825 by members of the Mechanics Institute needing a place to study during the summer when the institute was closed. By 1830 the library had over 350 members, and by 1851 it boasted a catalogue of over 18,000 volumes and was issuing over 200,000 volumes per year. It closed in 1893. (Brian Burch, 'Libraries and Literacy in Popular Education', in Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (eds), *Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 2, 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 371–87 (p. 381).
22 As for example Smith, *Poems, Songs and Ballads* (Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1865), and *Merry Bridal O' Firthmains and Other Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo and Co., 1866).
23 *Scotsman*, 13 March 1887, p. 4.
24 The plinth features a young child stretching to place a wreath around a bas-relief image of Smith.
25 Parish records show Robert was born in Wigtown on 5 October 1830, while the March 1851 census records him as working as a compositor apprentice and lodging in Leswat in a house headed by Jess Milright, whose half-sister Elizabeth Wyatt he would marry in November 1851.
26 A membership register compiled for the Scottish Typographical Association in 1887 suggests Robert Brough joined the union in December 1860, while Edinburgh membership records show him paying dues fairly consistently between 1862 and 1874. Robert Brough is listed as one of the signatories of an 1861 Memorial Circular issued to the Edinburgh Master Printers by Compositors requesting an increase in wages, at which point he was working for Murray and Gibb. See 'Unto the Master Printers of Edinburgh, the Memorial of the Journeymen Compositors of That City', (Edinburgh, 1861). At some point in the late 1860s Brough moved employment to Ballantyne and Co., going on to feature as bard at many of their work related events and outings through to the early 1870s. The 1861 Edinburgh census gives him living in 19 India Place with his wife Elizabeth Wyatt, four children and sister-in-law Jess Milright. A decade later he was living in 37 India Place with a fifth child.
27 Glasgow Typographical Society membership lists show Brough joining their branch in August 1876, when he took up a post at 'Blackie's Case', then shifting to Anderson and Mackay in January 1878. The 1881 census records him as living in the Kelvinside area of Glasgow and employed as a compositor printer, though in the 1891 census he was recorded as unemployed. Death records from 1903 indicate he died of Bright's Disease in Glasgow on 20 June 1903.

28 For further information on the history of women's entry into Edinburgh and Scottish printing domains, see the valuable study by Sian Reynolds, *Britannica's Typesetters* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).
29 Robert Brough, 'Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 5 January 1861, pp. 295–96.
30 Ibid.
31 Robert Brough, 'General News. By a Utilitarian Rhymer', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 1 May 1868, p. 28.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Robert Brough, 'Original Poetry. Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel', *Out on Strike*, 14 December 1872, p. 4.
35 A recent project on such social aspects of the Scottish print trade, including notes on the 'wayzgoose' (or annual work place social outings), can be found at www.sapphire.ac.uk/wayzgoose/ [accessed 15 May 2018].
36 A 'garret school' was an unregulated private school usually housed in small attic rooms or flats and overseen by teachers who were paid by the number of pupils taught. They typically concentrated on basic numeracy, writing and reading skills.
37 Alexander Smart, 'Madie's Schule', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 3 December 1859, p. 198.
38 William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986).
39 *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 6 October 1860, p. 262.
40 *Glasgow Herald*, 23 October 1860, p. 3.
41 *Scotsman*, 13 March 1874, p. 4.
42 James Smith, 'Baloo, My Bairnie, Fa' Asleep!', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 2 July 1864, p. 567.
43 James Smith, *Merry Bridal O' Firthmains and Other Poems and Songs*. 2nd edn (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo and Co., 1866). p. 26.
44 *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 22 August 1864, p. 3; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 August 1864, p. 3; *Scotsman*, August 20 1864, p. 3.
45 James Smith, *Poems, Songs and Ballads* (Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1865).
46 *The Ashburton Guardian*, 12 February 1903, p. 1; *Otago Daily Times*, 10 February 1903, p. 6; *Otago Witness*, 11 February 1903, p. 30; *Printers' Circular*, 1 December 1874, pp. 308–09; *The Stark County Democrat*, 3 March 1881, p. 7; *The Scotsman*, 14 January 1922, p. 11; *The Scotsman*, 12 August 1924, p. 6.
47 James Smith, 'The Three Wee Flowers', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 2 January 1864, p. 457.
48 Robert Brough, 'Address to the Printers of Auld Reekie Now in London', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 1 October 1870, p. 383.
49 Ibid.
50 See David Finkelstein, *Movable Types: Roving Creative Printers of the Victorian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
51 For more on this, see in particular Sarah C. Gillespie, *A Hundred Years of Progress. The Record of the Scottish Typographical Association, 1853 to 1952* (Glasgow: Printed for the Scottish Typographical Association by Robert Maclehose & Co., 1953), pp. 77–91.
52 For further details, see in particular Finkelstein, *Movable Types*, pp. 111–63.
53 *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 2 June 1858, p. 31.

54 *Scotsman*, 18 January 1865, p. 6. For the original comments by John Hill Burton, see *The Book Hunter* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1862), pp. 64–65.
55 *Scottish Typographical Circular* 1865, p. 86.
56 Robert Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 24–27. See also Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Others ignore creative compositors completely, as for example Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); Brian Maidment (ed.), *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-Taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1987).
57 Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy*, pp. 144–50.
58 For further information on the Scottish Chartist movement, see W. Hamish Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2010).
59 For discussions of Scottish print trade union activity in this area, see, for example, Sarah C. Gillespie, *A Hundred Years of Progress: The Records of the Scottish Typographical Association, 1853–1952* (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose and Co., Ltd., 1953), pp. 134–36.
60 Sydney J. Shep, 'Culture of Print: Materiality, Memory, and the Rituals of Transmission', *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 28 (2010), pp. 183–210.

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